

8. DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

General Principles

Global picture

What we do affects other people, not just locally but across the world. We are part of one eco-system, and now part of one global economy. The people most likely to be badly affected by shortages or climate change are those who are poor. They do not have the means to protect themselves or to buy their way out of trouble.

Energy

Our society depends on electricity. With our climate we need to heat our buildings. Traditionally we have heated buildings and generated electricity by burning coal, oil and gas - fossil fuels. But this process creates carbon dioxide which contributes to the warming of the atmosphere.

There are alternatives. There are **renewable sources**:

- **water power**, using streams, rivers and the tides. This can be done on the small scale (turbines in rivers, tidal generators by the sea) or the big scale (hydro-electric dams, tidal barrages, etc.) Tides are a completely reliable source; rivers less so; streams even less. But rising sea levels could affect large tidal installations.
- **wind power**. Wind generators can be large scale wind farms or small turbines fitted on a house. They are an intermittent source in our climate, requiring back-up resources, but they are relatively simple technology.
- **solar power**. There are solar panels which heat water directly and photo-voltaic (PV) cells which generate electricity from sunlight. PV cells are used increasingly in many developing countries as they are easy to install and generate electricity where it is used - but they do not work at night! Electricity companies in the UK will now buy surplus electricity from small generators so that, for example, a village church with PV cells could possibly sell its electricity for six and half days a week and then buy some back on Sunday morning when the church is used.
- **biofuels** include timber, woodchips and oil made from grain, rape, or sunflowers. Though the fuel creates carbon dioxide as it burns, when the plants grow they absorb carbon dioxide so they are effectively carbon neutral. However, a large amount of land is needed to produce fuel this way. To run an average family car for a year would require an acre (0.4 hectares) of land.
- **waste** can be burnt or decomposed to create heat which can be used to generate electricity. As it breaks down organic waste creates carbon dioxide naturally so no more is created in a generator than

would be given off by natural decomposition. However, burning releases other chemicals, some of which can be harmful. There need to be careful controls on emissions.

Nuclear energy is not renewable: it uses up uranium. Nuclear power stations generate very little carbon dioxide, although it is generated in large quantities in the mining, processing and transportation of uranium and in the construction of the power stations. The waste generated is small but it remains dangerous for centuries.

Buildings

The best way of cutting down on fuel consumption in a building is to reduce heat loss: with good insulation and cutting out drafts. However people and buildings also need ventilation!

A range of building materials is now being developed from renewable resources or recyclable materials.

Transport and Travel

Our way of living involves moving people and goods around. We can reduce that movement, but we might not want to eliminate it completely. Many of us have family and friends who live far away, and we want occasionally to meet other people for work. In terms of the carbon dioxide generated in a journey travel by plane is the worst, especially in short haul flights. Cars are also bad. Trains much more efficient and coaches more efficient still, as long as they have plenty of passengers. Cycling is very efficient. Walking more so. But that takes time, and is often not an option.

Our current way of life also involves moving goods from one place to another. Sometimes that is unavoidable if we are to have what we need, but sometimes there are alternatives. We can buy locally produced goods or do things differently.

Land use

There is sometimes a cry that housing development is 'covering the land with concrete.' However, houses with trees and shrubs in a garden often have a greater variety of wildlife than farmland.

Topsoil is a precious commodity. It takes a long time for good soil to be formed from rock and plant life, and it can easily be destroyed by chemical pollution or be washed away by water.

Wildlife and Landscape

There are probably very few people who want to see more species become extinct, or even to disappear from our landscape. But there is not a lot of space and sometimes there is a conflict of interest. People want

electricity but migrating birds need feeding grounds. People want roads and buildings, quarrying companies want to earn money by supplying this to people, but people also want to look at unscarred hills. Sometimes solutions can be found to suit all parties. Sometimes they cannot. At other times people need to ask bigger questions about how important their environment is and what the priorities are.

Food

The concept of food miles has recently been developed. Look at a pizza and work out how many miles the ingredients have travelled. Probably thousands altogether. However, it is a crude measure. Capsicums flown from East Africa have used a lot of fuel. Black peppers shipped from India have used very little. But a lot of fuel is used in transporting food.

As a rough guide the Christian Ecology Link has recommend that people 'Use their LOAF' and try to buy food that is locally grown, organic, animal friendly and fairly traded. This points to four related issues concerning food, but the issues are not simple and sometimes one principle is in tension with another.

- Our fuel consumption can be reduced by buying more **locally produced food**, although both our diet and the welfare of many farmers in other parts of the world would suffer if we restricted ourselves to eating only what can be produced in our own area.
- Much of the promotion of organic food depends on a suggestion that the only kind of responsible or **environmentally friendly** farming is organic. This is clearly not the case. There can be organic producers who otherwise behave in an irresponsible manner and environmentally responsible farmers who do not have any organic accreditation.
- **Animals** matter as well as people and should be treated well. The intense regulation of British food production means that it is possible to have some confidence about how well animals reared here have been treated, and symbols such as the Little Red Tractor are an indicator of this. However, live animals often suffer long and distressing journeys to slaughterhouses.
- **Fair trade** means food producers receiving a reasonable return for their work. Fairtrade tea, coffee and chocolate are now readily available in supermarkets. However these same retailers might not be paying a fair price to British or foreign farmers for their other food. Those of us who buy food need to investigate whether the supplier is really concerned about trading fairly or is just using these products to create an ethical image which hides unethical practices.

Waste disposal

For years we have put our waste in holes in the ground, but we are running out of holes, into the sea, but it cannot cope with more waste, or into the air, which pollutes the atmosphere. The solution seems to be:

- **Reduce** the amount of waste we generate
- **Re-use** what we can
- **Re-cycle** as much as we can of what is left over, and
- **Refuse** unnecessary goods and wrappings.

Simply trying to re-cycle everything is not a solution as transporting the waste uses up fuel and generates carbon dioxide.

Buying

One solution to waste is to buy less. That would be to go against the current in our society, which is geared to consumption. But an economy does not need to be so heavily based on manufacturing, transporting, buying and disposing of goods. We also have a large service sector. That could get bigger. There are other ways of doing things, which could emerge gradually as people live in different ways.

Water

We are now seeing shortages in some parts of Britain. In some parts of the world they are serious. Here, as elsewhere, it is partly a matter of managing the water we have. Much water is wasted: rainfall that could be harvested in butts or cisterns for later use; or from leaking water mains. There is scope here for personal initiative, and commercial and political action.

The Church

As individual Christians we can change how we live. In our local churches we can change what we do and how we do things. As individuals and as local churches we can be involved in our wider communities to bring about changes in society. We can campaign for different policies in local and national government. And as an organisation the diocese can do things differently. The best way forward is not always obvious, but we cannot stay as we are.

